Morocco and Israel: Cooperation Now and Then

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SEP 13, 2021, 12:25 AM TIMES OF ISRAEL

On December 10, 2020, President Donald Trump announced that Morocco and Israel agreed to re-establish diplomatic relations. Trump, also, issued a presidential proclamation[i] recognizing Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara and announced plans to open a US consulate in the region.

Morocco-Israel: All-Round Cooperation

Morocco and the State of Israel signed Tuesday, December 22, 2020, in Rabat, four cooperation agreements covering the diplomatic, aviation, water management, and trade fields as well as the promotion of bilateral investments.

In the diplomatic field, Morocco and the State of Israel signed an agreement that stipulates an exemption from visa requirements for holders of diplomatic and service passports.

In the field of civil aviation, the two countries have concluded an agreement that recognizes the importance of providing direct flights between Israel and Morocco. Also, both parties are committed to conducting discussions for the conclusion of another air services agreement.

The two countries also signed a memorandum of understanding that provides for technical cooperation in water management and development.

As for the promotion of economic relations through trade and investment, the two states signed a memorandum of understanding which provides for the negotiation of other agreements to govern these relations. These agreements will include a double taxation agreement, an agreement on the promotion and protection of investments, and an agreement on customs assistance.

These agreements come after the signing of the joint declaration by Morocco, the United States of America, and Israel which emphasizes the opening of a new era in relations between Morocco and the State of Israel.

The joint declaration was signed at a ceremony presided over on Tuesday, December 22, 2020, in Rabat by King Mohammed VI, the head of the Moroccan government, Saad-Eddine El Othmani, the senior advisor to the President of the United States of America, Jared Kushner, and the national security advisor of the State of Israel, Meir Ben-Shabbat.

As a matter of fact, prior to the official signature of cooperation agreements between Rabat and Tel Aviv, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs, R. Clarke Cooper said on Wednesday, December 16, 2020, at the opening of a virtual press briefing organized by the Foreign Press Center under the U.S. Department of State that the agreement between the United States, Israel and Morocco:[ii]

"continues to transform the region's security architecture and again is yet just another state to recognize Israel's sovereignty and Israel's membership in the community of states."

He went on to say that the Morocco and Israel relations will undoubtedly transform the Middle East, at large, in the long run.

The military official discussed, also, global political-military developments, including the recent US decision to impose sanctions against Turkey.

The all-time secret Morocco-Israeli security relations

As part of this collaboration, the Hebrew state has helped Morocco acquire advanced military equipment and weapons and has, also, contributed to the development of their know-how. Jerusalem is, also, believed to have helped Rabat assassinate an opposition leader in the sixties of the last century.

At the same time, this North African country allowed the mass emigration of Moroccan Jews to Israel, reportedly helped Israel win the 1967 Six-Day War, contributed to the Israeli-Egyptian peace process, and unsuccessfully attempted to help Mossad kill Osama bin Laden before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

Some details of these secret links have been known for decades, while others have only been revealed in recent years.

In 1961, after Morocco banned Jewish emigration in 1959, King Hassan II's accession to the throne made possible an agreement between him and Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion for Israel to pay Morocco for each Jew that Rabat allowed to leave the country and come to Israel.[iii] This is the beginning of **Operation Yakihn**.[iv] In exchange, Israel would have delivered weapons to Morocco and would have provided training to its security forces and intelligence operations.

In 1965, Hassan II allows Mossad to wiretap the meeting rooms and private rooms of Arab leaders staying in the country.[v] Jerusalem then receives crucial information that would have helped the Jewish state thwart a simultaneous attack by three Arab armies two years later and defeat them in just six days. The recordings reveal not only the division in Arab ranks – heated disputes broke out, for example, between Egyptian President Gamal Abdel-Nasser and King Hussein of Jordan – but, also, that Arab nations were ill-prepared for war. These details were revealed in 2016 by Major General Shlomo Gazit, former head of military intelligence, in an interview with the newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth*.

According to Ronen Bergman, an investigative journalist and military analyst for the *Yedioth Ahronoth* and the *New York Times*, Morocco asked only a month later for Israel to reciprocate by helping Rabat find Mehdi Ben Barka, a political dissident, then in France, who was considered the leader of the opposition. The Jewish state had previously warned Hassan II of a plot by Ben Barka to overthrow him – a plan in which the dissident had asked Mossad to take part in implementation. Instead, Mossad helped the king locate Ben Barka and lure him to Paris, where Moroccan agents killed him after torturing him. According to some versions of the incident, Mossad agents disposed of the body, which was never found.

Bergman revealed these details in a book published in 2018 on the history of targeted assassinations in Israel. The author, also, published recently an article in *The New York Times* summarizing the secret ties between Morocco and Israel.

In 1977, the Moroccan government played a key behind-the-scenes role in peace talks between the Jewish state and Egypt, with Rabat hosting secret meetings between advisors to Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. The talks culminated in the first-ever peace agreement between the Jewish state and an Arab state and led Jerusalem to persuade Washington to offer military assistance to Morocco, according to Bergman.

In 1995, the Moroccan intelligence tried – unsuccessfully – to help Mossad assassinate Osama Bin Laden, the al-Qaida leader who would become the mastermind of September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States, Bergman said. Mossad, then, tried to recruit Bin Laden's Moroccan secretary to locate him but failed to do so. Some details of the operation were published by the *Yedioth Ahronoth* in 2006.

As to what concerns the long time collaboration between Morocco and Israel on security and intelligence issues, Bergman writes in the *New York Times*:[vi]

"Israel has helped Morocco obtain weapons and intelligence-gathering gear and learn how to use them, and helped it assassinate an opposition leader. Morocco has helped Israel take in Moroccan Jews, mount an operation against Osama bin Laden — and even spy on other Arab countries.

The collaboration — uncovered in an array of interviews conducted and documents unearthed over many years — reflects a longstanding Israeli policy of building covert ties to Arab regimes where common interests — and enemies — could be found. In particular, Israel pursued a so-called periphery strategy, reaching out to more distant states that were far removed from the Israeli-Arab territorial dispute or that had hostile relations with Israel's own enemies.

The Moroccan-Israeli relationship stemmed in part from a large number of Jews in Morocco before the birth of Israel in 1948, many of whom would migrate there, making up one of the largest parts of Israel's population. Some million Israelis are from Morocco or descended from those who were, ensuring a deep, abiding interest in that country more than 2,000 miles away. "

Triangular Friendship USA, Morocco, and Israel: military and counterterrorism cooperation

The Triangular friendship:[vii] the USA, Morocco, and Israel made possible by the "Proclamation on Recognizing the Sovereignty of the Kingdom of Morocco over the Western Sahara "signed by President Donald Trump on December 10, 2020, and The Cooperation Agreements signed by Morocco and Israel on December 22, 2020, heralded a new era of open and intense cooperation in several areas.

The agreement signed between Israel and Morocco will lead to the establishment of a "magic" trio (Israel-USA-Morocco) in the arms sector, with American funding, reports *Israel Valley*.[viii] Clearly, the Hebrew state will help Morocco to build an arms industry. The same source could not provide details of the aid because of Israeli military censorship.

The military and intelligence cooperation between Morocco and Israel is not something new, it has secretly existed almost since the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 and it has taken more significance since the advent of the Green March in 1975 and the subsequent overtake and administration of Western Sahara by Morocco. Israel has provided weapons and training to the Moroccan army in counter-guerrilla warfare fighting tactics.

Since October 2020, there is a military cooperation agreement between Morocco and the United States. The U.S. Secretary of Defense, Mark Esper had signed the roadmap that defines this cooperation between the two countries that will go until 2030. The kingdom is an excellent customer of the U.S. arms industry, with orders for Abrams tanks, 24 F-16 "Viper" fighters and 24 AH-64E Apache attack helicopters, and, also, highly-sophisticated drones.

"*Now more than ever, our two nations are working closely together to meet the challenges of a complex security environment ranging from counterterrorism and other transnational threats to regional instability and broader strategic issues*,"

said the U.S. Secretary of State before signing the new military cooperation agreement.

Back in March 2020, Israel attended an anti-terrorism conference in Marrakesh on the issue of: "Warsaw Process Counterterrorism and Illicit Finance working group ". For security reasons, the name of the Israeli representative was not released. The summit in Marrakech focused on global efforts to fight al-Qa'ida and follows other Warsaw Process working groups where Israeli and Arab officials joined discussions on security issues.[ix]

On this topic, the US State Department said in a statement:

"*Delegations discussed the ever-changing threat posed by al-Qa'ida and its affiliates and acknowledged a range of efforts that can be employed to counter this still-potent threat, including the promotion of a set of non-binding principles*,"

And further added:

"*Participants shared their regional perspectives on countering al-Qa'ida and discussed threats from other terrorist groups. A number of delegations also noted the destabilizing activities of Iran and its proxies, especially Hizballah, and the need to collectively confront Iran's continued support to terrorist groups*."

Israel was one of more than 50 countries that are part of the Warsaw Process, which started with the Ministerial to Promote a Future of Peace and Security in the Middle East that took place in the Polish capital in February 2019.

On the active role of Morocco in counterterrorism and counterradicalism in the MENA region, Christopher S. Chivvus wrote:[x]

"Morocco has been an enthusiastic supporter of U.S. and European counterterrorism (CT) objectives, both domestically and further afield. Domestically, it has cooperated closely with the United States on counterterrorism, so much so that in 2004 it became a major non-NATO ally of the United States. For example, the United States holds an annual joint exercise with Morocco known as AFRICAN LION, trains Moroccan security personnel, and engages in other forms of CT-related security cooperation and financing. Morocco's domestic counter-radicalization programs have been widely promoted and

earned respect in Europe and the United States as possible models for other parts of the broader Middle East and North Africa region. Morocco has also sought to play a constructive role in Libya. "

On Thursday, Dec[xi]ember 10, 2020 Reuters, citing U.S. sources close to the negotiations, announced that the United States is negotiating the sale of at least four sophisticated MQ-9B Sea Guardian drones to Morocco. On Friday evening, December 11, the agency announced that Donald Trump had sent an opinion about this sale to the U.S. Congress, which must now examine it in order to approve or block it. According to the same source, the agreement also includes Hellfire, Paveway, and JDAM precision-guided munitions manufactured by Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, and Boeing. The drones are manufactured by General Atomics, a defense and nuclear physics company. They have a range of 6,000 nautical miles, or 11,100 kilometers, and can be used for a variety of sea and desert surveillance operations. This agreement with the Kingdom is one of the first sales of drones after the outgoing president's administration implemented its plan to sell more drones to foreign countries.

Algerian reaction and fears

The normalization of Morocco's relations with Israel has become the number one concern of the Algerian authorities. Recently, meetings of a very high level followed one another at the level of the General Staff of the Algerian Army. Meetings that brought together all the senior officials of the Algerian Military Institution. Conciliations were organized at the level of the General Directorate of Internal Security (DGSI), the most powerful branch of Algerian intelligence, as well as the Directorate of Documentation and External Security (DDSE). As a result of this normalization, all levels of the Algerian security institutions were in a state of shock and turmoil.

The main concern and the major fear of the Algerian authorities is the military, security, and technological collaboration between Morocco and Israel.

"In Algiers, we are not naive. We knew that Morocco is the country in the region that has the most advanced relations with Israel. But now the cooperation is official, and nothing can prevent the Israeli authorities from providing as legally as possible large quantities of the most sophisticated and advanced military equipment that is most dangerous to our national security. This is a major change in the balance of power in the region,"

(« A Alger, on n'est pas naïf. On savait que le Maroc est le pays de la région qui a les relations les plus avancées avec Israël. Mais, désormais, la coopération est officielle et rien ne peut empêcher les autorités israéliennes de fournir le plus légalement possible de grosses quantités d'équipements militaires de pointe les plus sophistiqués et les plus dangereux pour notre sécurité nationale. C'est un changement majeur dans les rapports de force dans la région »)

an Algerian security source told *Maghreb Intelligence*.[xii]

However, the same *Maghreb Intelligence* expresses understanding for the normalization given the historical strong link between Moroccan Jewish diaspora in Israel and its historical links with its country of origin, even after painful departure:[xiii]

"Morocco is distinguished from other countries in the region by the distinguished ties that unite the Moroccan diaspora in Israel to the person of the Alawite rulers and that are rooted in a specific history specific to the Moroccan model.

Moreover, the Sherifian Kingdom reserves full citizenship for Moroccans of the Jewish faith, who are both voters and eligible for election. Moroccan Jews also enjoy a legal space that conforms to the precepts of Judaism. A singularity that makes this Maghreb country unlike any other experience in the entire region of North Africa and the Middle East. "

("Le Maroc se distingue des autres pays de la région par les liens distingués qui unissant la diaspora marocaine en Israël à la personne des souverains alaouites et qui sont ancrée dans une histoire spécifique propre au modèle marocain.

D'ailleurs, le royaume chérifien réserve aux Marocains de confession juive une citoyenneté à part entière, en étant à la fois électeurs et éligibles. Les juifs marocains bénéficient également d'un espace juridique conforme aux préceptes du judaïsme. Une singularité qui fait que ce pays du Maghreb n'est identifiable à aucune autre expérience dans toute la région d'Afrique du nord et du Moyen-Orient. ")

Faced with the strengthening of the Tel Aviv-Rabat axis with the blessing of Washington, Algiers has already taken precautions and solutions have been considered to strengthen military cooperation with Russia. Despite a suffocating economic crisis, the Algerian authorities are going to propose a much stronger partnership with the Russian military forces, including a request for unlimited access to advanced weapons with long-term credit lines that would allow Algeria to pay for its expensive military acquisitions without choking itself financially.[xiv]

Russia should also have the right to test the most destructive weapons on Algerian territory or to develop new military protocols by testing Algerian military infrastructure, our source said. In addition, Algeria will propose joint military exercises with the Russian army and will regularly invite high-ranking Russian officers to conduct joint operations with their Algerian counterparts. "For our national security and in order to balance the balance of power, we are even ready to open a Russian military base on our territory if the Moroccans really grant this right to the Americans near our borders," explains an Algerian source for whom Morocco has just provoked the rage of Algeria, which does not intend to let it be done.

*Algérie Patriotique**[xv]*** (Patriotic Algeria), for its part, is more worried about the:

"Officialization of the Morocco-Israel couple", a decision by which "the enemy is approaching Algeria". "Israel has thus definitively established itself in the Maghreb and nothing says that Mauritania will not follow in Morocco's footsteps in the weeks or months to come ". For the media, the report is worrying: "Algeria will thus be caught between a neighbor to the west that offers Tel Aviv the opportunity to formalize its presence in North Africa and to take root there, a fragmented Libya and prey to the desires of foreign powers who are fighting a war by proxy, and the Sahel caught between terrorist groups and the French army,"

the electronic media wrote.

Conclusion

It goes without saying that regional security in the MENA region will be a splitting headache for the Western world in the decades to come as terrorism and violent religious radicalism will remain alive and kicking in swaths of the Muslim world and especially in the Sahel where the French army is bogged down in a fight against phantom armed terror organizations.

Morocco and Israel will have to work in hand in hand militarily, with the help of the United States and Nato, to circumvent radicalism and terrorism in the ex-Western Sahara now Moroccan that could prove a practical geopolitical platform to help Sahel countries such as Mali, Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso, and Nigeria fight terrorism efficiently: Israel has the experience, the US the logistics and the weaponry and Morocco has men in arms with tremendous African experience.

The three counties can, also, work together in fighting low-cost terrorism and lone wolf jihadists by gathering necessary intelligence on violent radicalism and training religious leaders in ***wasatiyya*** Islamic theology. This will definitely help Israel integrate slowly but surely the MENA region and become a symbol of stability, coexistence, and development and get rid of its long-time pariah status.

Last but not least, Morocco in its quality of president of Al-Quds Committee of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation -OIC-, alongside the US and Israel could bring the Palestinians to the negotiating table and find a lasting solution to the Palestinian predicament within an acceptable two-state solution to all concerned parties.

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"The United States affirms, as stated by previous Administrations, its support for Morocco's autonomy proposal as the only basis for a just and lasting solution to the dispute over the Western Sahara territory. Therefore, as of today, the United States recognizes Moroccan sovereignty over the entire Western Sahara territory and reaffirms its support for Morocco's serious, credible, and realistic autonomy proposal as the only basis for a just and lasting solution to the dispute over the Western Sahara territory. The United States believes that an independent Sahrawi State is not a realistic option for resolving the conflict and that genuine autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty is the only feasible solution. We urge the parties to engage in discussions without delay, using Morocco's autonomy plan as the only framework to negotiate a mutually acceptable solution. To facilitate progress toward this aim, the United States will encourage economic and social development with Morocco, including in the Western Sahara territory, and to that end will open a consulate in the Western Sahara territory, in Dakhla, to promote economic and business opportunities for the region.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, DONALD J. TRUMP, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim that the United States recognizes that the entire Western Sahara territory is part of the Kingdom of Morocco.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this fourth day of December, in the year of our Lord two thousand twenty, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and forty-fifth.

DONALD J. TRUMP "

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Italy, England and Greece.